

FALL IN!

SOLDIERING IN DAKOTA



3560. The Cavalier.
The young soldier and his horse
at Camp Cheyenne.

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A Tough Go

New territory lured people of all kinds to Dakota. Settlers saw little future there without the frontier military. As they poured in, the new arrivals expected the army to either remove or control the native tribes. Soldiers provided security – and built roads, did surveying, and explored the territory and its resources.



General Miles at Pine Ridge, 1891.



Springfield Model 1873 infantry rifle.



Infantry jacket, ca. 1880.

Dakota was no plum assignment. Soldiers faced bad weather, bad food, danger, and incredible boredom. Too much territory and too few men made soldiering in Dakota a tough go. This exhibit looks at the life of frontier soldiers – their work, their play, and their legacy.



Drum from Fort Sully, ca. 1880.



Fort Sully band, 1885.



Fort Meade guard mount, ca. 1885.



Colt Model 1860 revolver.

MILITARY IN DAKOTA

Security First

Frontier soldiers provided security above all. The army was expected to keep the peace. They faced an unorthodox foe on the plains. Eastern battle tactics would not work. Soldiers who respected and learned the ways of the Indians were more successful than those who belittled the fighting skills of the plains tribes.



Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 1863.



Harper's Weekly, 1868.

First Dakota Conflict

The first army engagement in Dakota took place in 1823. Colonel Henry Leavenworth's forces moved in to punish the Arikara who had attacked traders on the Grand River. Once established in Dakota, the military never left.

Treaty of 1868

Western Dakota became the Great Sioux Reservation with the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. Enforcing the treaty's provisions proved impossible with the Black Hills gold rush. Troopers could not hold back the onslaught of miners.



Andrew Johnson peace medal, 1865.



Fort Laramie negotiations, 1868.



Miners being removed from the Black Hills, Harper's Weekly, 1875.

DAKOTA FORTS



Three things mattered most for Dakota forts – good ground, drinkable water, and nearby wood for building and for firewood. Forts offered settlers peace of mind even in places where little actual danger of attack existed. Fort soldiers also kept the peace between warring tribes and prevented settlers from moving onto Indian land. As hostilities between settlers and Indians increased, forts served as staging areas for military campaigns. Some posts served as Indian agencies.

Fort Snelling, 1825-1946

During the fur trade era, Fort Snelling protected the country's northern border. Late on, thousands of soldiers passed through Snelling to forts in Dakota Territory.



Fort Laramie, 1834-1890

Fort Laramie protected settlers traveling the Oregon Trail in the 1850s. It also served as an important command post during the 1870s Indian Wars.

DAKOTA FORTS



Fort Pierre, ca. 1855.

Fort Pierre, 1855 – 1857

Originally a trading post, Fort Pierre Chouteau became a military fort in 1855. General Harney and his troops moved in that October. That winter, a third of the post's horses froze to death. Malnutrition weakened many of Harney's soldiers. Fort Pierre was abandoned in 1857.

Old Fort Pierre

*O, we don't mind the marching,
Nor the fighting do we fear,
But we'll ne'er forgive old Harney
For bringing us to Pierre.
They say old Shoto built it,
But we know that isn't so,
For the man that built the bloody ranch
Is reigning down below!*



Fort Pierre Chouteau millstone, ca. 1840.

Fort Sully, 1863 – 1894

Located near Pierre, Fort Sully served as a stopping point for military expeditions from the east. The fort also provided security, keeping settlers off Indian land and Indians off settler's land as much as possible. Built on marshland, the original site had little access to grass and wood. In 1866, the post moved 30 miles upriver.



Fort Sully, ca 1864.



Fort Sully
sundial, ca. 1870

Fort Abraham Lincoln, 1872 – 1891

Built on a Missouri River bluff, Fort Abraham Lincoln protected survey and railroad crews as the Northern Pacific Railroad pushed west. In 1873, six cavalry companies joined the fort's three infantry companies. Water had to be hauled by wagon from the Missouri – no small task for a post of over 600 soldiers.



Fort Abraham Lincoln blockhouse, 1872.

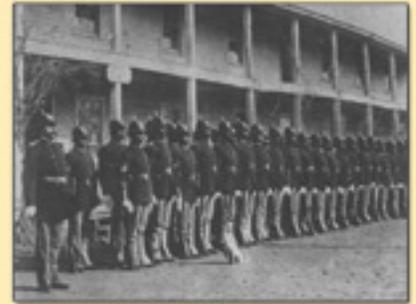
DAKOTA FORTS

Fort Randall, 1856 – 1892

An Army supply depot, Fort Randall also protected settlers. Soldiers had good living quarters, but the desolate post offered little excitement. Many deserted. To improve life, the army allowed soldiers' families on the post in 1871. The post organized fraternal clubs and fielded a championship baseball team that regularly played Yankton's team.



Fort Randall, ca. 1865.



Fort Randall, 1880.

Fort Meade, 1878 – 1944

Fort Meade protected the gold fields of the Black Hills. General Phil Sheridan supposedly laid out the post by pointing out the location for each building with his saber from horseback. Comanche, the only surviving cavalry horse from the Little Big Horn battlefield, was officially retired with military honors at Fort Meade.



Fort Meade played The Star Spangled Banner at daily retreat long before it became the national anthem in 1931.



Buffalo Soldiers

Indians called black soldiers in Dakota buffalo soldiers because their hair looked like a buffalo's curly mane. Buffalo soldiers served at Fort Randall and Fort Meade.

Fort Sisseton, 1864 – 1888

Following the Minnesota Uprising of 1862, settlers wanted military protection. Fort Wadsworth protected settlers in eastern Dakota. Renamed Fort Sisseton, the site met all three conditions for building a fort – good ground, good water, and nearby wood.



The military closed Fort Sisseton in 1888.

DAKOTA CAMPAIGNS



Clock taken from New Ulm during the Minnesota Uprising.

Minnesota Uprising of 1862

In 1862, the Dakota Indians in Minnesota were starving. Their crops had failed. Food promised by treaty was not delivered.

Violence broke out and hundreds of Indians and settlers died in a five-week conflict.

Following the uprising, the military established several forts in Dakota to keep the peace.



The surviving Dakota people from Minnesota were sent to Crow Creek Reservation on the Missouri River. Disease and starvation killed many.



Battle of Whitestone Hills

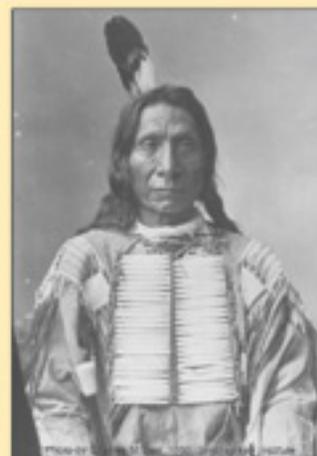
Troops attacked a Sioux camp at Whitestone Hill in 1863, killing or capturing over 200 Sioux men, women and children.



Great Sioux Reservation, 1874.

Red Cloud's War

The army built forts along the Bozeman Trail to protect miners and settlers moving west. Lakota chief Red Cloud attacked these forts to stop the white movement onto Lakota land. The attacks ended with the Treaty of 1868. The Treaty closed the forts and created the Great Sioux Reservation west of the Missouri River.



Red Cloud, 1880.

DAKOTA CAMPAIGNS

Sioux Wars

The discovery of gold in the Black Hills in 1874 created a gold rush. The flood of people made enforcing treaty rights impossible. A series of conflicts erupted as the Sioux fought for their sacred land. Ultimately, the tribes were forced onto small reservations and the Black Hills opened.



Ledger drawing, ca. 1890.



ca. 1890

Exploring the Hills

In 1874, Lt. Col. George A. Custer led the first military exploration of the Black Hills. Officially searching for a fort site, the expedition wanted to confirm rumors of gold. Troops, newspapermen, miners, scientists, engineers, and a photographer made the trip.



Cavalry saddlebag, 1879.



Gold!

Expedition member Horatio Ross discovered gold along French Creek. Custer sent word to Fort Laramie and the rush was on. Gold fever drew hundreds of prospectors into the forbidden Black Hills. Finding gold set off the Sioux Wars.

DAKOTA CAMPAIGNS

Battle of Little Big Horn

The most famous action of the Sioux Wars took place on June 25, 1876, on the Little Big Horn River. Lt. Col. George A. Custer's troops attacked a large Lakota and Cheyenne camp. 265 soldiers died.

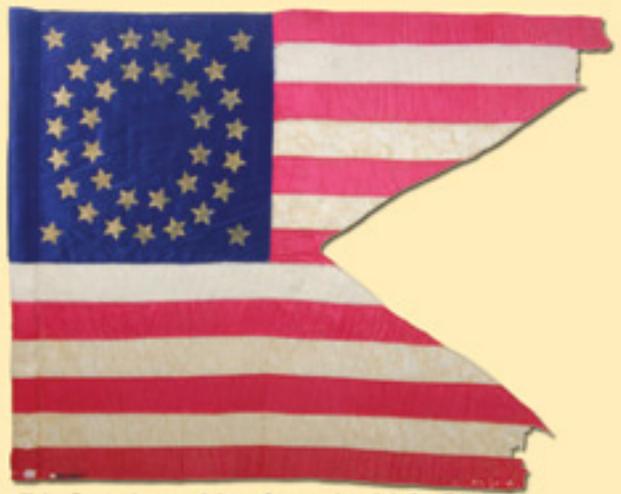
Following the battle, the military came down hard, determined to end the conflicts once and for all.



Custer became a hero for many following his demise at the Little Big Horn.



Battle of the Little Big Horn pictograph by Chief His Horse Looking, ca. 1890.



7th Cavalry guidon from the Little Big Horn battlefield.



Wounded Knee

On December 29, 1890, about 300 Lakota people were killed by troops along Wounded Knee Creek. The soldiers were escorting Big Foot's band to the Pine Ridge Agency. As the troops disarmed the Lakota, a gun went off and chaos broke out. Many of the dead were women and children. The Wounded Knee Massacre ended the Sioux Indian wars.



Hotchkiss guns threw a two-pound explosive shell up to 1500 yards. A Hotchkiss gun was used at Wounded Knee.



Ghost Dance shirt taken at Wounded Knee, 1890



MILITARY

Dakota Posting

Many Dakota Territory officers had Civil War experience. Life and work in the isolated frontier posts differed greatly from military service back east. Out west, officers took on jobs for which they had little training such as leading surveying parties and supervising construction crews.



Officer's quarters at Fort Meade, ca. 1885.



Fort Robinson barracks, 1889.



First Sergeant Conrad Luther's uniform, Fort Randall, ca. 1875.

Noncommissioned officers fit between officers and common soldiers in the command chain. Sergeants handled drill and discipline within a unit. A mix of Civil War veterans and immigrants filled the enlisted ranks. Half the men the Army recruited from 1865 to 1874 were foreign-born. Joining up brought them west where many stayed after their service ended.



Officer's epaulets, 1885.



Fort Sully officers, ca. 1875.

Non-Military

Non-military people worked and lived in frontier posts along with officers and enlisted men. These included scouts, post traders, and military family members.



Civilian Employees	
Quartermaster Dept.	
1 Clerk	full pay \$12.00
1 Transportation Sgt.	\$100.00
1 Forge Master	\$15.00
1 Engineer	\$100.00
1 Tinsmith	\$10.00
1 Chief Barber	\$15.00
1. Asst. Barber	each \$10.00
1 Blacksmith	\$10.00
1 Wheelwright	\$10.00
1 Guide & Interpreter	\$10.00
2 Shoats	each \$10.00
12 Teamsters	\$10.00



Officers' wives joined their husbands in frontier forts. Some posts let married enlisted men bring their families, too.

The Major's wife sighed as she looked across the parade ground. Yet another posting – this time to Dakota Territory. These cramped officers'



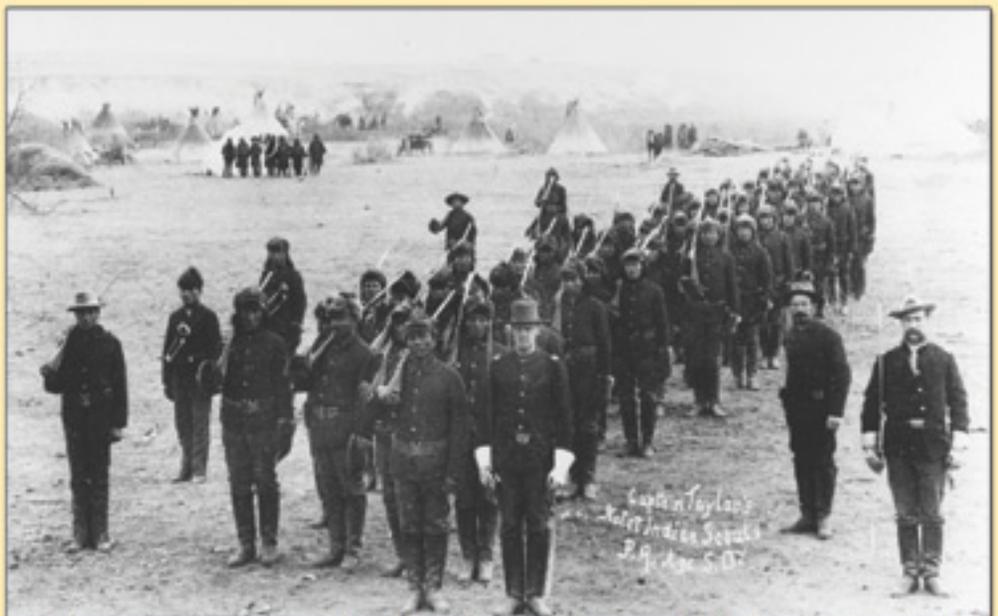
quarters offered little beyond a roof and walls. A few other officers' wives had stopped by earlier to welcome her and the boys. Her husband had promised to find a likely trooper to act as striker and handle the family's everyday chores. She glanced around the snug parlor and smiled. The major's comfortable chair, the flowered rugs, and the other parlor furniture would make this Dakota post home.



The War Department licensed post traders. Stores carried tobacco, clothes, household goods, and locally grown food. Separate bars for officers and enlisted men drew in thirsty troopers.



Scout helmet, ca. 1875.



Indian scouts served the frontier military well. Scouts fought in combat. They made up almost half of General George Crook's fighting force. Shown here are Captain Taylor's scouts from the Pine Ridge Agency, ca. 1890.

WORK

The bugle call blasted the sharp morning. The cavalryman groaned and rolled off the narrow bunk. Reveille already? A splash of water got the blood rolling. Stable call – time to get to the barn and take care of Ol' Surefoot. He'd check that foreleg carefully this morning. Mess call – bacon, hardtack, and hot coffee filled a man's belly. After breakfast came fatigue call. What miserable job would he get? He gritted his teeth – please not roadwork. Construction wasn't soldiering! The trooper brightened – maybe escort duty? A ride outside the post in this clear weather would be welcome.



Fort Meade infantry, ca. 1890.

Many frontier duties had nothing to do with military training or fighting. Soldiers cut timber, hauled wood, built roads, and tended gardens. Enlisted men served as company tailors, cobblers, cooks, blacksmiths, and farriers.



Packing ice at Fort Meade, 1897.



Soldiers used unfamiliar tools and equipment doing non-military tasks. Surveyor's scope, ca. 1885.

Soldiers usually ate regularly, if not well. Hash, stew, baked beans, hardtack, salt bacon, bread, beef, and coffee filled empty stomachs. Canned tomatoes and beans became staples in the 1880s. Company gardens provided fresh fruits and vegetables.



Talented cooks in the frontier military were treasured – and rare. Fort Keogh cooks, ca. 1890.



OFF-DUTY AND UNRULY

Off Duty

Frontier soldiers filled their off-duty hours with drinking, visiting, practical jokes, playing cards, and gambling. Some posts organized sports teams. Baseball and horseracing were popular. Fort Sisseton had an evening writing school for the men.



Off-duty at Fort Sully 1869.



Breaking the Rules

Military discipline was harsh. Punishment came for both large and small infractions. Minor incidents were usually handled within the company. Violators faced physical punishment, fines, restriction to quarters, assignments to nasty work details or extra guard duty.



Harper's Weekly, 1891.



Infractions could cost "a month and a month" – a fine of one month's pay and 30 days in the guardhouse. Drinking caused most problems. Pictured, Fort Sisseton guardhouse.

Desertion was the most common serious military crime in the late 19th century. The military hated losing the property deserters took. Fort Meade recorded 24 desertions in 1879.

C. Spillman, E. Dexter, Jack Young stole their horses out of the stable last night and deserted.

December 6, 1865. Andrew Fisk, Fort Wadsworth

Poisoning Officers

Private Kelly wore these leg irons at Fort Sully in 1878. Accused of putting strychnine on the meat for the officers' mess, a court martial sentenced Kelly to death. Before he could be shot, the President had to approve the sentence. President Hayes refused, and Kelly was subsequently tried in Yankton by a civilian court and acquitted.



TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Soldiers in Dakota carried weapons, rations and personal effects with them into the field. If they were lucky, wagons hauled tents, gear, and rations. If not, they made do with flimsy shelters and the food they could carry.



Before 1873, the infantry used Springfield rifled muskets. The cavalry carried Spencer lever-action or Sharps single-shot carbines. After 1873, both groups used model 1873 Springfield rifles.



The Army used the .44 Colt Army Model 1860 revolver during the Civil War and Red Cloud's War. The Colt .45 replaced this model in 1873.

Winter buffalo coats and leggings, muskrat caps and fur gauntlets kept some frostbite at bay.

Fri. Dec. 1, 1865. Bought a watch of C. Taylor. Gave \$20 and a jacket. Went over to the Indian camp tonight. Traded my overcoat, blouse and an old blanket for a splendid buffalo robe.

Andrew Fisk, Fort Sisseton.

3rd Cavalry saddle and blanket, ca. 1880.

Wearing full dress uniform was usually reserved for inspections and ceremonial occasions. For everyday, working or "undress" uniforms did the job. In practice, soldiers wore the required uniform during duty and working hours and dressed as they pleased when off duty.

STILL SOLDIERING IN DAKOTA

Soldiers in Dakota's isolated posts did their job in spite of harsh weather, dangerous work, and day-to-day monotony. They protected the territory, surveyed and mapped the terrain, and built roads. As they mustered out, many frontier soldiers stayed in Dakota and made lives for themselves. They became farmers and businessmen in the land they had protected as soldiers.



Off-duty at Fort Sully, 1869.

Sun. 31st. An awful day – snowing and blowing furiously. Kept in the house and played seven-up. Mustered for pay this morning. This is the last day of 1865. One year ago was at Ft. Snelling in charge of the Convalescent Detachment. These pages record a good many incidents in many places. Goodbye, old year. In closing my second year's diary since I have been in the service, the thought arises – where will I be, and under what circumstances will I write of the closing day of 1866.

Andrew Fisk, Fort Wadsworth, December 31, 1865.



Citizen soldiers have always served Dakota. In 1865, the militia set up Fort Dakota on the Big Sioux River to protect the area after the 1862 Minnesota Uprising. Today, South Dakota National Guard units serve the state and nation. Fort Dakota, 1866, and the Redfield Armory, 2008.



The 200th Engineer Company of the South Dakota National Guard training, ca. 1995.